

BOOK REVIEWS

Language in Society 42 (2013)
doi:10.1017/S004740451300047X

URIEL WEINREICH, *Languages in contact: French, German and Romansh in twentieth-century Switzerland. With an introduction and notes by Ronald I. Kim and William Labov*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. Pp. xxxiv, 401. Hb. \$149.

Reviewed by ELVIRA GLASER
Deutsches Seminar, Universität Zürich
Zürich, 8001, Switzerland
eglaser@ds.uzh.ch

The publication of *Languages in contact* in 1953, first reprinted in 1963, helped establish Uriel Weinreich's reputation as one of the most outstanding linguists of the twentieth century. This early work was to a great extent based on his Ph.D. dissertation, *Research problems in bilingualism: With special reference to Switzerland*, defended in 1951 at Columbia University. Weinreich (1953:xi) mentions this fact and refers to his fieldwork in Switzerland carried out in 1949 and 1950. Many readers, however, may be unaware that the published book did not include all parts of his dissertation, in spite of occasional hints referring to a more detailed description in the unpublished manuscript. Discussing, for example, phonic interference in Romansh-Swiss German language contact, Weinreich refers to "details in doctoral dissertation" (1953:14), and, in the chapter on geographic areas, he relates to his description of the German-French border north of Fribourg (1953:89–91).

The book under review here, while alluding through its title to the 1953 publication, presents in fact the until now unpublished manuscript of Weinreich's dissertation. Up to now, hardly anybody knew of the manuscript kept by the Columbia University Archives, despite the existence of a number of black and white microfilm reproductions around, for example, at the Zurich University libraries (Deutsches Seminar and Bibliothek Jakob Jud). The 2011 edition is based on the personal copy of William Labov, who assumes this copy to be one of only two complete copies existing. It includes (p. v) the reproduction of a coloured map of the linguistic situation of Switzerland from about 1941 (by Heinrich Frey). The original text was digitized with the help of Optical Character Recognition; the hand drawn colour maps were adapted to grey scale and some bar graphs reformatted. In addition, the editors adapted the text in several points, which I comment on later. For the most part, however, the original text is reproduced.

Initial questions might arise in view of a sixty-year-old manuscript, such as whether it is indeed still worth reading, and what the motivation was for the editors Ronald I. Kim and William Labov to publish it. In their introduction,

they emphasize that Weinreich's dissertation gives an "exemplary demonstration of his research program for the study of multilingual communities" (xxii) and that "the bulk of the detailed linguistic and ethnographic description of the French-German and German-Romansh contact situations" (xxi) had remained unpublished. These descriptions, largely based on Weinreich's own field work, were, indeed, not integrated in the 1953 publication that focussed on a comprehensive synthesis of "findings and problems," as the subtitle indicated. Thus, the value of the present publication is largely dependent on the quality of this field study.

The in-depth discussion of the two contact situations takes place in Part III, "French and German" and Part IV "German and Romansh," of the present publication. The actual division in chapters and parts is the result of a breaking down of Weinreich's text by the editors in order to facilitate reading. Part I is devoted to "General research problems," among them the characterization of the bilingual individual and bilingual communities as well as a summary of the "Linguistic problems of bilingualism" (Ch. 3). The essence of Part I is the core of the 1953 publication, though differently organized, revised, and richly supplemented, especially with respect to the linguistic problems.

Part II, "Bilingualism in Switzerland: Cultural setting and linguistic effects," starts with an overview on "Switzerland as a quadrilingual country" (Ch. 4), mainly based on existing sources, including the presentation of the administrative setting. Ch. 5 discusses in great detail the situation of the standard languages and the dialects, as well as the relations between them, again based on numerous written sources, in many cases supplemented by Weinreich's own experience. This description of the linguistic situation in Switzerland around 1950, that is, a short time after the climax of the *Geistige Landesverteidigung* 'spiritual defence' during World War II, which led to a stabilization and even extension of the use of the Swiss German dialects—from the perspective of a thoroughly observant and well-informed foreign linguist is of the utmost interest. It is, however, obvious that this exposition is also, in many parts, out-dated. This is not only true with respect to new administrative rules and some of Weinreich's forecasts on the linguistic evolution—for example, the erroneously expected replacement of the polite second person plural pronoun by the third person plural "for formal address" (106)—but also concerning much of the secondary literature.

The editors have compiled some of the most relevant information in the introductory chapter, *Multilingualism and language contact in Switzerland since 1951*, on the growing presence of English, the creation of Rumantsch Grischun as a written standard, the acceptance of Romansh as an official language (*Amtsprache*) in 1996, and the census of 2000. Not mentioned, but also important is the *Sprachengesetz*. 'Language law' from 2007 (actually *Bundesgesetz über die Landessprachen und die Verständigung zwischen den Sprachgemeinschaften*; cf. http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/441_1/index.html), which defined the support of Italian and Romansh and the quadrilingual situation as national duties, as well as two research projects concerning trilingualism in Grisons (Grünert, Piconi, Cathomas, & Gadmer

2008) and the linguistic competences of the Swiss population (cf. Haas 2010), respectively. Besides their very brief general update, the editors give comments within the text on “especially noteworthy or outdated points” (xxvi). Of course, such a selective commenting will not satisfy everybody. In general, I consider it a good decision to comment restrictively, as otherwise there would simply be too many points to comment on. Conversely, Weinreich’s text is coherent as such, and anyhow, it must be borne in mind that it was written more than sixty years ago. Thus, the selective comments on Weinreich’s text can even create confusion. Indeed, sometimes important issues are missed, for example, given that there are comments on the situation of Italian in Ticino schools (115), but not concerning the recent discussion on Standard German as the language of instruction (90–91; cf. the data from the 2000 census concerning Swiss German and Standard German as languages of instruction presented in Lüdi & Werlen 2005), the massive presence of the Swiss German dialect in the radio, or the meanwhile flourishing dialect literature of good quality, and so on. To avoid such uncertainty, I would have preferred a more extensive bibliography with at least the most relevant titles concerning the topics discussed, leaving the original text uncommented.

The most important part of the book, taking up about 200 pages, is the description and analysis of two opposite contact situations, the French-German contact in the southern part of the Lake District (*Seebezirk*) in the Canton of Fribourg, as an example for a stable language contact and the Romansh-German contact in Central Grisons as a situation of ongoing language shift. Both parts start with a general characterization of the specifics of the particular bilingualism and its known linguistic effects. In the case of the French-German “border bilingualism,” Weinreich comments on the opposite situation in the bilingual cities of Biel and Fribourg and outlines the situation of the linguistic minorities along the language border. In his case study he thoroughly describes the economic, educational, and denominational situation and the kind of bilingualism of the communes in this area. Many figures—some of them poorly reproduced—illustrate the linguistic repertoires and other characteristics. The comparison of the census from 1880 with 1941 shows some minor changes as a result of migration but not of linguistic assimilation. Weinreich identifies the reason for the stability in the “relative social and cultural self-sufficiency of each language group” (333). It would have been highly interesting to compare this result with the census of 2000. For example, patois, which is now extinct, was then still in use in some places.

The detailed description and analysis of the Romansh (Sutsilvan)-German language contact is likewise interesting. In addition to the chapters on the contact situation “approaching a state of total bilinguality” (333) and the case study on the linguistic behaviour between Thusis and Reichenau, Weinreich integrated a chapter on the attempts of reversing the ongoing language shift. Being in contact with all of the protagonists, his intimate knowledge enabled him to give a very vivid and impressive description of the movement at that time. The census data from 2000 demonstrate the nearly completed language shift in that zone.

We owe a debt to the editors of Weinreich's dissertation for bringing to light these two close-ups of complex and differing contact situations. The empirical results based on recording speech of bilinguals in guided conversations, interviews, and months of observation bear conclusive evidence that the "sociocultural setting in which languages are in contact ... along with structural factors, plays a role in controlling the direction, extent, and nature for linguistic cross-influences in the languages" (336). Appendix A provides excerpts from the recordings of bilingual children from the respective areas, according to Weinreich (1953:13) an innovative method used here for the first time. Weinreich comments on the interference phenomena expected from the general outlines in Chs. 8 and 12. These chapters together with the notes to the interviews contain many observations, some of which would have deserved a more detailed analysis. For example, in note 2 (305), Weinreich notes the practice of Romansh children to write final *-a* for reduced vowels, stressing the difference to "the German practice of spelling *e*." It is, however, a well-known characteristic of Grison Swiss German writing practice to note the final vowel as *-a*; on p. 317, *c*, the periphrastic present tense formation with *tua* 'to do' is clearly overrated; on p. 321, *a krank^h gro:smuatar* 'an ill grandmother' is not in line with the adjective forms given on the same page; on p. 343, *ufamana* 'on a' (dat.masc.sg.) is erroneously considered an error (344, n. 5); it is in fact a variant of *ufama*.

Sometimes, Weinreich's judgments appear affected by the zeitgeist, for example, judging Swiss peculiarities of Standard German as "errors" (102). Finally, there are only very few flaws and typos that might cause confusion; for example, p. 117, n. 150 (in the text) should indeed refer to n. 149; on p. 308, (13) *b*, *aely* reads *namely*; on p. 333, *Theae* reads *They*; *Kranzmeyer* (passim and already in Weinreich 1953) reads *Kranzmayer*. The editors have obviously worked very carefully in changing some transcription conventions and references in parts and chapters. If there were some more bibliographical hints as to where to find updated information, it would be all the more useful for readers not familiar with the Swiss context.

To sum up, this is a rich book with a wealth of interesting data and observations, as well as profound considerations on the nature of bilingualism, a book that is fully worth of being studied nowadays. One should be careful, however, not to forget, that despite the new title, it is the description of a historical situation and not of today's Switzerland.

REFERENCES

- Grünert, Matthias; Mathias Pichenoni; Regula Cathomas; & Thomas Gadmer (2008). *Das Funktionieren der Dreisprachigkeit im Kanton Graubünden*. Tübingen: Francke.
- Haas, Walter (ed.) (2010). "Do you speak Swiss?" *Sprachenvielfalt und Sprachkompetenz in der Schweiz. Nationales Forschungsprogramm NFP 56*. Zürich: NZZ Libro.
- Lüdi, Georges & Iwar Werlen (2005). *Sprachenlandschaft in der Schweiz. Eidgenössische Volkszählung 2000*. Neuchâtel: Swiss Federal Statistical Office.
- Weinreich, Uriel (1953). *Languages in contact: Findings and problems*. New York: Linguistic Circle of New York.

(Received 15 January 2013)